



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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**AMERICAN PEREGRINE FALCON SOARS NEAR RECOVERY; INTERIOR
DEPARTMENT CONSIDERS REMOVING FROM ENDANGERED SPECIES LIST**

The American peregrine falcon, speed king of the sky, may soon fly off the endangered species list, Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt said today.

"After a narrow brush with extinction, the peregrine falcon is coming back," Babbitt said during a rooftop press conference overlooking Wall Street in New York City. "Unfortunately, the environmental laws and research programs that brought the peregrine back are now at risk of extinction themselves.

"The fact that we can see peregrine falcons right here in the heart of New York shows that strong environmental laws and sound science can save endangered species. Once a tragic symbol of what was wrong with our environment, the peregrine is now a symbol of hope."

Babbitt said efforts to slash funding for the National Biological Service and to weaken the Endangered Species Act undermine the very programs that brought the falcon back.

"The original research that linked DDT to declining numbers of peregrine falcons and other birds was conducted by scientists of the agency now known as the National Biological Service," Babbitt said.

"The recovery programs and legal protection that helped bring the falcon back were carried out under the Endangered Species Act. If efforts to gut these essential conservation programs continue, future endangered species may not be as lucky as the peregrine falcon."

Babbitt's announcement was made at the Bank of New York, which hosts a nesting pair of peregrine falcons--one of 12 pairs in the city. He was joined by Dr. Thomas Cade of The Peregrine Fund; Gerald Barnhart, director of fish and wildlife for the New York Department of Environmental Conservation; Marilyn Gelber, commissioner of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection; and Alan Griffith, vice chairman of the Bank of New York.

"We are very pleased about the recovery of the peregrine falcon," said Dr. Tom Cade, founder of The Peregrine Fund, who joined Babbitt for the press conference. "I believe this is the first recovery of a species across the entire country. Biologically speaking, the species is no longer endangered or threatened and it is only a matter of the government working out the legal aspects."

Babbitt said the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is not yet removing the falcon from the endangered list, but is taking the first steps in that process by publishing a notice of intent to propose delisting the falcon. This is a call for information about the status of the American peregrine throughout its range. Data collected during the 60-day public comment period will help the Service decide whether it is appropriate under the Endangered Species Act to propose the peregrine for delisting.

The falcons on the Bank of New York Building, named Alexandra and Hamilton by bank employees, hatched five chicks this spring. In recent years, falcons have made themselves at home in a number of cities, including Baltimore, Boston, Chattanooga, Denver, Phoenix, and Seattle, where the birds nest on the ledges of tall buildings and feed on pigeons.

One of nature's most beautiful and exciting birds-of-prey, the peregrine narrowly escaped extinction from the effects of the pesticide DDT. The falcon has been listed as endangered since 1970 and has been brought back thanks to the ban on DDT, protection and recovery programs under the Endangered Species Act, and the determined efforts of a dedicated cadre of falcon enthusiasts.

Populations of American peregrines are now estimated at nearly 1,000 nesting pairs in the Lower 48 and more than 300 in Alaska, with additional nesting birds in Canada and Mexico. Numbers have been steadily climbing even though the American peregrine was eliminated in parts of its range. In some areas, it is more numerous now than it was before the use of DDT.

The American peregrine once ranged throughout much of North America from the boreal forests of Canada and Alaska south to Mexico. Populations plummeted as the use of DDT became widespread after World War II.

DDT and other organochlorine pesticides devastated many bird populations, including the peregrine, because they caused birds to lay thin-shelled eggs that broke during incubation. The impact of DDT on the American peregrine was most profound in the eastern United States and southeastern Canada, where the

peregrine was virtually eliminated from the wild by the mid-1960s. In the West, some American peregrines managed to withstand the impacts of pesticides, although numbers declined by as much as 80 to 90 percent.

In the 1960s, the work of U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologist and author Rachel Carson helped focus attention on the dangers of pesticides to wildlife and humans. Her pivotal 1962 book, Silent Spring, based on contaminants research conducted by Service scientists, gave the world a glimpse of a landscape without the familiar sounds of returning birdlife each spring. Use of DDT was restricted in the United States in 1972 and in Canada in 1970.

The effort to bring the falcon back has been long and intensive. Reintroductions of captive-bred peregrines helped reestablish the birds in parts of the country where they had completely disappeared. Organizations such as The Peregrine Fund and a number of state fish and wildlife agencies also launched reintroduction programs, sometimes even in urban areas where peregrines now nest atop skyscrapers and feed on abundant pigeon populations.

The Peregrine Fund was founded in 1970 at Cornell University in response to the catastrophic decline of the peregrine falcon throughout much of North America. The efforts to save this species resulted in breakthroughs in the field of endangered species research. In addition to the peregrine falcon, The Peregrine Fund is involved with conservation projects around the world with species such as the California condor, Philippine eagle, aplomado falcon, harpy eagle, Mauritius kestrel, orange-breasted falcon, Hawaiian forest songbirds, and other species. The Peregrine Fund has numerous other programs around the world that focus on preserving endangered environments (e.g. forests, wetlands, etc.) and improving local conservation efforts.

Falconers, whose sport has made them experts in breeding and raising falcons, have played a key role in the comeback of the American peregrine. Falconers pioneered early captive breeding efforts to produce young falcons for release into the wild and provided at least half of the peregrines used to establish the first captive-breeding programs. Falconers have continued to donate both young and adult peregrines to reintroduction efforts.

Populations of American peregrine falcons are approaching or have surpassed recovery goals in all recovery regions throughout North America. Recovery goals outline minimum numbers of nesting pairs in each region, the number of offspring produced each year, and in some areas, the thickness of eggshells.

American peregrines are medium-sized hawks with long, pointed wings and long tails. Feeding primarily on other birds, they nest on cliff ledges and sometimes on buildings and bridges in urban areas. Peregrines are known for their agility and grace in flight and can reach speeds of up to 200 miles per hour when diving in pursuit of prey.

The American peregrine is one of three peregrine subspecies found on the North American continent. The arctic subspecies, also once listed as endangered, was declared recovered in 1994. Because it inhabits remote areas not affected by DDT, the Peale's peregrine was never in danger of extinction.

As part of its notice of intent to propose delisting the American peregrine, the Service is seeking comments on the subspecies' status. Of special interest is information on current threats; data on its range, distribution, and population size; and information on peregrines in Mexico. Information and comments may be sent to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, 2493 Portola Road, Suite B, Ventura, California 93003. Comments will be accepted until August 29, 1995.

After evaluating all available information on the status of the American peregrine, the Service will decide whether to propose the species for delisting. If a proposal is made, the public will again have opportunity to comment on the change in status before a final decision is made.

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Facts

U.S. Department of the Interior

AMERICAN PEREGRINE FALCON POPULATION STATUS

Recovery goals for the American peregrine falcon were established for four recovery regions in the United States, as well as several regions in Canada. Goals include minimum numbers of territorial pairs (breeding pairs) in each area. Also considered are the number of offspring each pair produces and, in some cases, eggshell thickness.

Following are the current population estimates for American peregrine falcons in each recovery region in the United States:

<u>Region</u>	<u>Estimated Number of Pairs</u>	<u>Goal</u>
Alaska	300	28*
Pacific Coast	224	185
Rocky Mountain/Southwest	559	183
East	150	175 - 200

* The goal for Alaska was not a statewide number but a minimum of 28 nesting pairs in two study areas. A total of 69 pairs were counted in the two study areas in 1994 and biologists estimate at least 300 pairs currently nest in the state.

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